

# Across The New York Footlights

By GEORGE JEAN NATHAN.

(Copyright, 1916.)

Despite the moments of dramatic effectiveness and a novel and engaging scenic notion, the truth remains that the play "Any House," by Owen Davis and Robert H. Davis, made apparent upon the stage in the Cori Theater, is devalued by its extravagant sentimentality. This sentimentality is piled with a so unrelenting muscle that it becomes obstructive even to an audience trained, as has been the Cori Theater audience, through a protracted study of "Fog" and "My Heart," in the advanced physics of the softer affections.

The evening begins well. Says the playbill: "The curtain will neither rise nor fall, but one may tarry in this street and view the drama that takes place within the walls of Sardus Summerfield's home." The eye beholds a city thoroughfare, as first it sweeps the auditorium. There are three houses, the central one of which is that of the Summerfield family. The petty drama of the byway enacts itself by way of preface. The neighbors enter their house. A newboy bawls out his "extras." Then, one by one, persons ring the bell of the middle domicile and are ushered therein by the maid. And presently the walls of the house open and we peek at the life of the family that lives there.

Summerfield, head of this household, is a crabbed lawyer, who, since his wife's death, has been bitter with the world. He has (regards Collaborator Owen) driven his elder daughter, Cori, out of the house without a farthing because she has had the impudence to flout his wishes and marry a certain John Wakefield. And even now he is planning to marry her off to a younger daughter if she persists in permitting to continue the attentions of the young secretary, David Bradford. Summerfield broods and glowers through his days. His better self, dominant in the early part of his life, has now been thrust from him, exiled. And not merely in his dealings with his family and friends, but so, too, it soon is to transpire, in his business affairs.

Corporation lawyer and counsel for the militant official of a railroad system in the hands of the Cori Theater, Summerfield learns of the death of his client and simultaneously that the latter has been entrusted to him valuable documents which are to be turned over to his hated son-in-law, Wakefield. Those documents will betray the ignominy and corruption of the heads of the system and will save the fortunes of the inventors. Come now to Summerfield the guilty fellows and seek to enlist his aid by appealing to his personal ambitions. The better self of the man is no more—and he surrenders himself and the promise of the tell-tale documents into their keeping. The men leave; the lights are darkened; Summerfield sits at his desk—alone, thoughtful. There is—ha starts—some other than himself in the room. He looks up. A figure resembling him stands before him. "Who are you?" he cries. "And what do you want here?"

"I am your better self, come to warn you," replies the other. Follows a struggle between the corporation lawyer and this other and holier self. But Summerfield is firm. He will fight his life out to the bitter end, bitterly. The better self (regards to Will Levington Comfort, Dr. Crane, et al.) preaches, pleads, entreats, supplicates and all the rest of the synonyms. Yet to no purpose. Summerfield, wearied by the conflict that has been going on within his head, sinks into a chair. He doeszes. His elder daughter (wife to the hated Wakefield) enters and approaches him. Believing her father to be awake, she urges him to give over to her the precious documents which he holds in his hand; the documents which will help her husband out of the sore predicament in which he has found himself. Over the sleeping man hovers the capital B better capital S self and Summerfield hands over the papers (regards again to Owen). Awakening, Summerfield is once more his old grouchy self (no capitals this time). He rants and bellows at the devil with every one and everything. He will not permit his heart to get the better of him. He will go on as before. But the vision, the apparition of the capital B better capital S self has gnawed at his well-being. In alarm, he summons his old friend, Dr. Bassett, and seeks his advice. "There," says the doctor, pointing to the door of the dead wife's room, "a room that Summerfield has not entered since his late passed away, 'there is a room full of memories, a room that contains your better self. Go into it again and all will change. You will be a tenderer and a happier man.' But Summerfield says nay. Yet, when gone has the medico, the fellow reflects. His better self has confronted him again, has urged him to enter the room. And presently, with defiant stride, enter it he does.

The two Summerfields, Jekyll and Hyde, here fight things out. Hyde triumphs until Jekyll points out a shawl upon which the deceased had been laboring when death claimed her. Hyde takes it in his hand, and his eyes moisten. And seeing the light, he staggers back across the threshold into the other room and forgives everybody in sight just as a newboy is heard calling out, in the street, the tidings of peace in Europe.

A highly sentimental structure, as you will observe. And one the philosophy of which is debatable. The play manuscript is, in spots, adroitly managed and, as has been said, presents moments of interest, and to boot—the basic notion of the exhibit is of more originality than one usually encounters in the playhouses of Broadway. Yet the persistently "uplifting" quality of the work drowns out what there might otherwise be of thesis melody. The difficulty of the average man (and it was evidently the intention of the authors to dramatize an average house in the average street) is quite the reverse of that shown in "Any House." It is a man's impulse to habitual kindness that in general works him ultimately ill.

Edwin Arden plays Summerfield in a monotonous manner, and William B. Mack recites the role of the Better Self in inappositely funeral tones. The stage direction of Robert Milton, indeed, is decidedly faulty. This director has caused the manuscript to be interpreted in the wrong tempo, has stressed unnecessarily the dolorous note, has staged the play almost entirely about the desk at which the immobile Summerfield sits. There is altogether too little movement, too small a measure of lightness. Nor has the lighting been adroitly managed. The artificial stratagem of dimming the lamps every time the apparition is due to appear deletes these scenes of much of their effectiveness. Frank Gilmore gives a good account of the physician; Milton

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Silla is a wooden secretary; Hayward Ginn, the Wakefield; James Seeley a quizzical railroad president; Jay Wilson a comedy relief broker. Of the ladies, Katherine Emmett is the only one who reads her lines with any degree of conviction and manner. As the younger daughter, Edith Luckett is quite bad and, as the sister of Summerfield, Louise Galloway is even more so. The turning stage is used to a nice effect in the quick manipulation of the two scenes in the final act, though it were advisable to devise some way of diminishing the noise attendant to its maneuvering; a bit of music by the orchestra might, perhaps, do the trick.

In conclusion, Robert H. Davis—if he will accept the humble suggestion of one who is at once critic and friend—should quickly bring himself to prevail upon his collaborator to extract from "Any House" a considerable measure of its present uplifting marmalades. There is some good—some very good—material in the manuscript. But this good material is currently washed out of sight by the tides of charlatanism. Robert Davis is a man of amazing fecund mind. He supplies three-quarters of the plots for all the stories and novelettes printed in all the brochures issued by the Munsey folk. And he has been supplying them for the last dozen years or more. He has furnished plots not only for thousands of magazine writers, but also for his own use in a play or two, a half dozen vaudeville sketches, several motion pictures and a stack of novels. It is, therefore, inconceivable that the fellow will not some day supply the stage with a smashing thematic idea. But if Mr. Davis does not write the play himself, let us urge him by all means to seek out a collaborator who shall present the idea with a tonic dose of honesty and sincerity, side-stepping valiantly all the sentimentalities, all the petty trickeries of the Broadway masque-moques.

When Margaret Illington reaches New Orleans with "The Lie," her engagement there will coincide with the Mardi Gras Festival.

Announcement was made last week that Messrs. Klaw & Erlanger have acquired a new melodrama by Bayard Veiler, the author of "Within the Law" and other plays. It is as yet unnamed.

The cast for "Nothing But the Truth," which H. H. Frazer will produce, consists of George Parsons, Effingham Pinto, Morgan Conant, Ned A. Sparks, Edwin Holt, Elizabeth Nelson, Maudie Turner Gordon, Miriam Doyle, Emily Calloway, Mary Harper and Eva Francis.

Eugene Walter's dramatization of the Fox novel, "The Little Shepherd of Kingdom Come," is soon to reach the stage.

Dion Titherage, the juvenile of "Paganini," is a brother of Madge Tither-

age and came to this country with his sister and the late Lewis Waller when they put on a repertoire of Shakespeare several years ago.

George Bernard Shaw's latest play, "Fishery, V. C.," a skit on recruiting, was produced at the Abbey Theater, Dublin, and immediately suppressed.

Mrs. George Arliss, who is so well remembered as the Lady Bessie, wife of Darrall, in Mr. Arliss' famous play of that name, will again be seen with her husband in "Paganini" at the National Theater tomorrow evening.

"The Weavers" will be taken on the road for a short tour following the close of the engagement at the Garden Theater this week.

A new comic opera, "The Road to Mandalay," is now in rehearsal at the Park Theater, where it will have its New York premiere tomorrow evening.

Washington is to be the first city this season to see Ethel Barrymore in "Our Mrs. McChesney" at the termination of her six months' run in that comedy at the Lyceum Theater in New York. Miss Barrymore's local engagement appears at the National Theater the week of March 6.

Julia Herne, daughter of the late James A. Herne of "Shore Acres" fame, has written a play called "The Outsider," which will be presented tomorrow night at New Britain, Conn.

General Manager Edward F. Albee, of the Keith enterprises, spent Washington's Birthday and part of Wednesday in the city, visiting his sister, who resides here.

"Kick In," which is to be seen at Poli's this week, was originally a one-act vaudeville sketch which Willard Mack used as a curtain-raiser when he and his clever wife, Marjorie Rameau, were appearing as stock stars in San Francisco.

Oliver Morosco, sponsor for "So Long, Letty," announces another musical comedy production. It is called "Sweethearts and Wives." Augustus Thomas, Earl Carroll and Alfred G. Robyn are named as authors.

Elsie Ferguson will, it is said, play Lady Teale in Beerbohm Tree's production of "The School for Scandal."

E. S. Willard left an estate valued at \$71,448.

By arrangement with Klaw & Erlanger, Sir Herbert Tree will open his Shakespearean season at the New Amsterdam Theater, New York. The engagement will begin in March.

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SCENE FROM  
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# AMUSEMENTS.

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